

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (canceled)
2. (previously presented) A strain according to claim 14 that has been derived from a strain having all of the identifying characteristics of ATCC 55962.
3. (previously presented) A method of preparing gram negative bacteria of improved competence, said method comprising:
 - a) transferring a polynucleotide encoding an *Hte* mutation included in the strain deposited as ATCC No. 55962 into gram negative bacterial cells; and
 - b) treating the cells from (a) with a competency inducing procedure; whereby competent cells are produced.
4. (original) A method according to claim 3, wherein said bacteria is *E. coli*.
5. (previously presented) A method according to claim 3, wherein the competency inducing procedure comprises washing the cells with a buffer comprising at least two of potassium acetate, KCl, MnCl₂, CaCl₂, glycerol, rubidium chloride, and hexamine cobalt chloride.
6. (original) A method according to claim 4, wherein said *E. coli* have the genotype Δ (*mcrA*)183 Δ (*mcrCB-hsdSMR-mrr*) 173*endA1 supE44 thi-1 recA1 gyrA96 relA1 lac tet^R Hte**{*F'proAB lacI^fZΔM15 Tn10(Tet^R) Amy Cam^R*}.
7. (previously presented) A method according to claim 3, said method further comprising freezing the competent cells.
8. (canceled)

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9. (previously presented) A strain according to claim 14, wherein cells of said strain have been made competent by a high competency induction procedure comprising washing the cells with a buffer comprising at least one of potassium acetate, KCl, MnCl₂, CaCl₂, glycerol, rubidium chloride, and hexamine cobalt chloride.

10. (previously presented) A strain according to claim 9, wherein said cells of said strain have been frozen.

11. (original) Competent cells produced by the method of any one of claims 3 through 7.

12-13. (canceled)

14. (currently amended) An isolated strain of *E. coli*, comprising an *Hte* mutation included in the strain deposited as ATCC No. 55962 and having more efficient transformation with foreign plasmids than *E. coli* that lack ~~such an~~ said *Hte* mutation.

15. (previously presented) A strain according to claim 14, wherein cells of said strain have been made competent.

16. (previously presented) A method for cloning or subcloning heterologous genetic material into a cell comprising cloning or subcloning heterologous genetic material into a cell according to claim 11.

17. (previously presented) A method for cloning or subcloning heterologous genetic material into a cell of a strain comprising cloning or subcloning heterologous genetic material into a cell of the strain according to any one of claims 14 and 2.

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